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ABSTRACT

Exploring the concept of a "permeable" curriculum, this paper provides concrete examples of the social and cultural challenges of a curriculum that allows for the interplay between teachers' and children's language and experiences. The paper uses a recent study in an urban primary school to provide an illustration of the diverse kinds of social goals that energize young children's language use. The paper focuses on the children's composing, the diverse kinds of cultural material they draw upon, and the ways in which teachers may work to enact a permeable curriculum in which the worlds of teachers and children come together in instructionally powerful ways. The first section of the paper provides a perspective on children and on literacy in which children are social negotiators, addressing others as they explore and exploit the power of symbolic tools as social mediators. The next two sections feature the curricular negotiations of Eugenie (a second-grader), her peers, and her teachers. The final section of the paper elaborates on the theoretical substance of the permeable curriculum. Six figures presenting students' drawings and one table illustrating that words like "audience" and "sense" do not have generic meaning are included. Contains 55 references. (RS)

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Negotiating a Permeable Curriculum: On Literacy, Diversity, and the Interplay of Children's and Teachers' Worlds

Anne Haas Dyson
University of California, Berkeley

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Negotiating a Permeable Curriculum: On Literacy, Diversity, and the Interplay of Children's and Teachers' Worlds

> Imagine that it is the end of a long teaching day. You are thumbing through your students' work and come across second grader Eugenie's text (see Figure 1). You sigh and take a closer look at Eugenie's "follow-up" writing to your lesson on the Civil War and Abraham Lincoln. The assignment had been to fold a paper into eight boxes, number each box, and then draw and write in each something important about Lincoln. You hadn't, so far as you can recall, discussed Lincoln's personal life. But here, in Eugenie's paper, is an unidentified woman declaring her love (for Lincoln?) and what you assume to be a marriage scene, "Do you? Yes I do" being a common script among your children for wedding vows. You start to wonder, as teachers often do, if you and Eugenie had participated in the same lesson; if, indeed, you were in the same world.

This feeling of separation from and puzzling about the lives of children is basic to the topic of this essay: how teachers construct a shared world with their students, or, to rephrase, how they might enact a "permeable" curriculum that allows for interplay between teachers' and children's language and experiences. Such a shared world is essential for the growth of both oral and written language, and it is essential as well if teachers and children are to feel connected to, not alienated from, each other. Indeed, research in schools serving children from diverse sociocultural backgrounds suggests that teachers and children often do feel disconnected, a feeling exacerbated by differences in race and class (Committee on Policy for Racial Justice, 1989; Rothman, 1992).

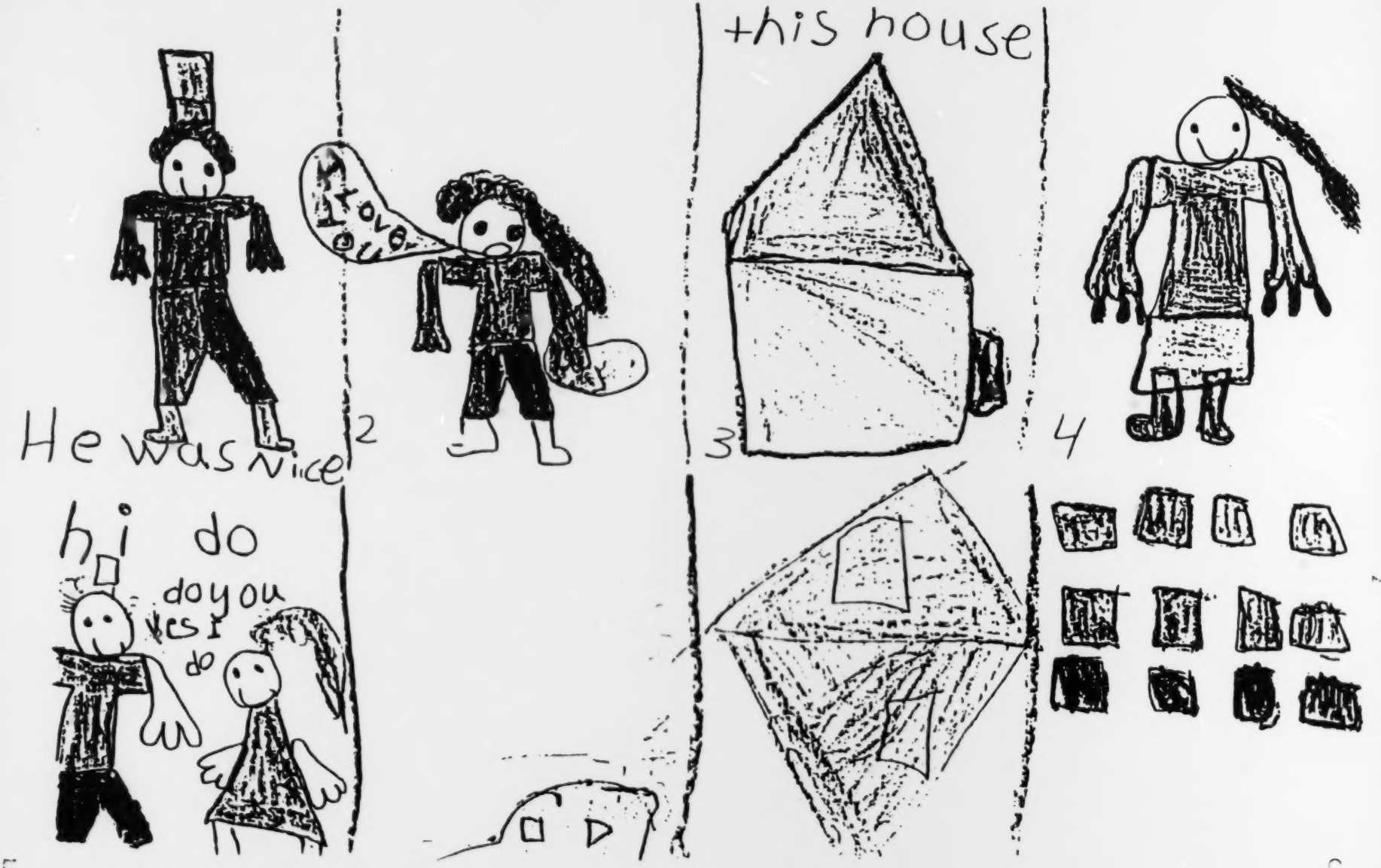

Figure 1. Eugenie's important facts about Lincoln.

To counter such alienation, many educators turn to the language arts. For example, we as teachers engage children in literature that reflects the diversity of children's lives and the commonalities of the human spirit, and we encourage children themselves to craft their own experiences, real and imagined, on paper. And yet, whatever curricular materials and activities educators offer, deep in children's own lived worlds, these activities are renegotiated, influenced by social goals which educators might not anticipate and infused with cultural material--thematic content and literacy genres--which they may not value.

Thus, building on what children do--the longstanding truism of both developmentally and culturally appropriate teaching--is not so easy, because doing so involves granting legitimacy and visibility to social purposes and cultural materials that educators may view as trivial, irrelevant, and even distasteful. The permeable curriculum is an idea, like democracy and social justice, that is easy to embrace--until one is faced with the diversity of human values and behaviors, with, for example, a second grader's cryptic text about love, marriage, and Lincoln.

In this essay, I explore the concept of a permeable curriculum, aiming to provide concrete examples of the social and cultural challenges it entails. I draw on a recent study in Eugenie's urban school to illustrate the diverse kinds of social goals that energize young children's language use, particularly their composing, the diverse kinds of cultural material they draw upon, and, most important, the ways in which teachers may work to enact a permeable curriculum, in which the worlds of teachers and children come together in instructionally powerful ways.

Undergirding this essay is a perspective on children and on literacy that differs in emphasis from those most dominant in current pedagogical discussions of the language arts. Informed by the psycholinguistic insights of the seventies and, particularly, by studies of child language development (e.g., Brown, 1973; Read, 1975), pedagogical texts stress that young children are *inventors;* assisted by others, they figure out how written language works.[1] By engaging in the processes of composing and response, children move beyond egocentric play with writing to true communication.

In contrast, influenced by recent social theories about child language (e.g., Bruner & Haste, 1987; Rogoff, 1990; Stern, 1985), the emphasis herein is on children as social *negotiators;* addressing others, they explore and exploit the power of symbolic tools as social mediators. The pedagogic goal is not to socialize egocentric child writers but to make varied ways with written language sensible to socially sensitive children, children who live in an increasingly culturally and politically complex society. I introduce this perspective in the following section and then, after two sections featuring the curricular negotiations of Eugenie, her peers, and her teachers, I elaborate on the theoretical substance of the permeable curriculum in the paper's final section.

Dialogue and Development: Children as Social Negotiators

From a sociocultural perspective, the development of language, oral or written, is couched in dialogue. Indeed, words "can only arise in interindividual territory" (Volosinov & Bakhtin, 1973, p. 12), that is, between people who are members of a social unit. Thus, within the interactional rhythms and daily routines of their family lives, young children begin to use language to interpret their experiences. They take words learned from others and use them to give voice to their own feelings and thoughts (Bakhtin, 1986). As Stern (1985) explains:

> Meaning results from interpersonal negotiations involving what can be agreed upon as shared. And such mutually negotiated meanings (the relation of thought to word) grow, change, develop, and are struggled over by two people and thus ultimately owned by us. (p. 170)

Language, therefore, both contributes to and is acquired within common interpretive worlds, in which adults and children share intersubjectivity or "mutually created meanings" about experiences.

On a broader plane, negotiating meanings is also negotiating culture, or the meaning structures shared by people who belong to a particular group (Geertz, 1973). As children grow up in families and communities, they learn ways of interpreting and acting on the world through language. Those culturally patterned ways of using language are evident in stories, jokes, prayers, arguments, and other genres through which people construct their social lives together. The development of language, then, occurs as children learn to participate in ever more effective ways in culturally valued activities mediated through the tool of speech. Children enter into their culture as they tell stories, tease, argue, pray, and, in other ways, interact with others through publicly shared words or other signs (e.g., songs, dramatic actions).

In homes and classrooms, children begin to use written language also as a cultural tool for constructing symbolic worlds and for engaging with others. Young children's written texts are often multimedia affairs, interweavings of written words, spoken ones, and pictures; and yet their graphics, too, can be used as tools within their own worlds, as Eugenie and her peers will illustrate (see also Dyson, 1989; McLane & McNamee, 1990; Newkirk, 1989).

This notion of children entering, through language use, into social and cultural dialogues is complicated in our schools, though, because schools are not homogeneous worlds. Although the teacher governs the official school world, in which children must be students, the children are also members of an unofficial peer world, formed in response to the constraints and regulations of the official world, and they are members as well of their sociocultural communities, which may reform in the classroom amidst networks of peers (D'Amato, 1987; Erickson, 1987; Roberts, 1970). (See Figure 2.)

Within each world, children have different kinds of relationships to each other and to their teacher, and, moreover, they enact those relationships through intersecting but nonetheless distinctive ways of using language; that is, each world may have differing notions of effective language use, of appropriate discourse themes,

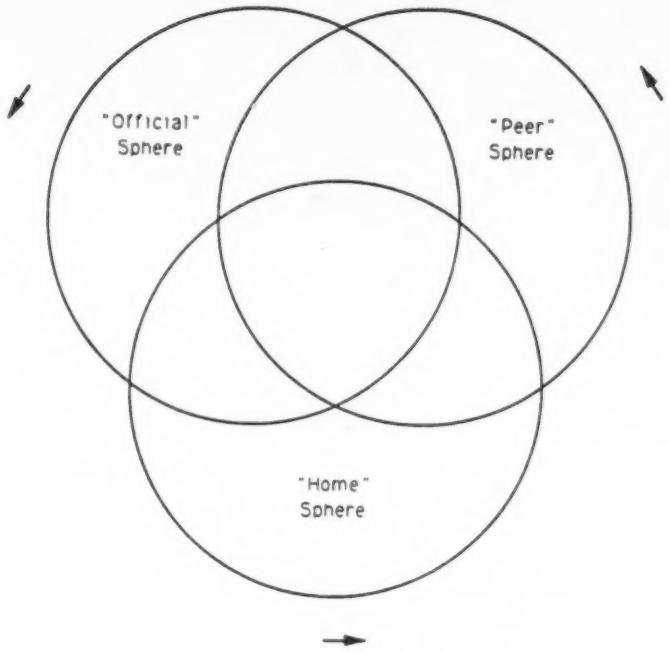

Figure 2. The multiple social worlds of the classroom. (Note: In classrooms, children are at once members of diverse reference spheres. The intention here is not to pull apart that essential dynamic but simply to provide a graphic metaphor of the existence of these spheres. There are no neat boundaries between "home" and "school," nor between the official [teacher-controlled] sphere and that of peers.)

structures, and styles (Hymes, 1980). Thus, teachers offer what they hope will be relevant and intellectually engaging activities, but, within the children's worlds, those activities are interpreted in new ways, infused with unexpected social and cultural meanings.

As teachers, then, we must attend to much more than children's invented words on a page, for writing is *not* just a specialized way of marking (although it's that, too). Moreover, we cannot assume that our notions of authentic social purposes for writing and response are shared with our young students. Rather, we must attend to children's worlds, for literacy is a way of taking action, of entering into a social dialogue (Bakhtin, 1986; Scribner & Cole, 1981). On the one hand, we must allow--indeed, support--the embedding of written language in children's social worlds, so that they find it a useful symbolic tool (a suggestion made by educators as separated

in time and space as Ashton-Warner, Freire, and Vygotsky). But, on the other hand, we must also help children expand and negotiate among the sociocultural worlds--the dialogues--in which they participate.[2] In the words of Rosen and Rosen (1973), a classroom should be

> [a] meeting place of. . . the children and the adult. The open [permeable] classroom not only welcomes the children and their own ways of thinking and feeling, but it also creates a life of its own. . . a delicate web of relationships. . . which is as complicated as that in any home. As complicated but different, for it creates new possibilities, new speculations, new styles. (pp. 31-32)

To illustrate the interplay possible between the worlds of young children and of teachers, I turn to the social and intellectual work done by children and teacher in Eugenie's kindergarten/first-grade classroom, particularly during the daily composing period; the composing period was rich in such interplay, since it was a relatively unstructured time when children were, in fact, supposed to "express themselves" and the teacher was supposed to "respond." Then, to clarify this concept of permeability, I offer an interpretive vision of Eugenie's "Abraham Lincoln" event in a first- and second-grade classroom, an event in which the curriculum was much more impervious to child intrusion.

The Evolution of a Permeable Curriculum

Eugenie's kindergarten/first-grade classroom was in an urban primary (K-3) school in the East San Francisco Bay Area. The school served both an African American community of low-income and working-class households on the southwest side of its attendance area, and an ethnically diverse but primarily European American community of working- to middle-class households on its northeast side. For two

years, I observed in this school, guided by six "key" children, kindergartners through third graders, all African American, who allowed me access to their peers and neighborhood friends. While I focused on children from one sociocultural group in one school, my research concern was not behaviors specific to any one group of children but, rather, the dynamics of, or the interplay between, children's official (teacher-governed) and unofficial (child-governed) classroom worlds and how that interplay figured into children's language use, particularly their composing.[3]

Eugenie's teacher Louise was European American and in her forties; she was an experienced and highly skilled teacher, knowledgeable about recent pedagogical innovations and sensitive to the social issues important to her children. Each day she structured a daily composing period, in which all twenty-seven children drew, wrote, talked, and dictated. After they finished their work, the children gathered on the rug to present their own texts to the classroom audience.

In response to her children, Louise commented on the individual messages and broader genre qualities of their work (i.e., the themes, structures, and styles), and she stressed child reflection and decision making about their texts, as in the following example:

> It's early in October. The children are joining Louise on the rug after a composing period. Louise first notes that Edward J. is making his writing book all about sports. Today he has drawn a boxer and written a backwards "3." The three, Edward then explains, is because "it's the third round."
>
> Other children, comments Louise, have decided to "label" their pictures. For example, Monique has drawn a tepee and written, "This is me and my TP." Louise comments that hers "could be a picture book."
>
> "A picture book for a little kid," adds a child.
>
> Austin has a twist on the picture book idea. He says that he has made a "guess-what's-happening book." Louise points out that, on

the back of each of his pictures, there's a "description of what's happening."

Calvin's is a "wordless picture," featuring a tree, a man, and a hat.

"What do you think Calvin was thinking of?" Louise asks.

"*Caps for Sale,*" sings the child chorus.

"He doesn't have a mouth," comments a child.

"Does he need a mouth?" Louise asks Calvin.

"No," says Calvin.

"No," says Louise.

As the year progressed, Louise not only used the genre labels of books (e.g., "picture books"); she and the children noted connections of topic, character, plot, and language style (e.g., the use of a rhyming pattern). In this way, she helped children "grow into the intellectual life of those around them" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 88). Informed by workshops on writing-process pedagogy, she expected that, as the year progressed, the children's desire to communicate and to understand others' texts would lead to their assuming increased responsibility for offering advice to each other as writers (see, for example, Graves, 1983).

But a permeable curriculum--a negotiated classroom culture--cannot emerge from a *unidirectional* curricular vision. Teachers as well as children must be open, curious, and willing to imagine worlds beyond their own. Louise was such a teacher. In her classroom, the daily meeting time did not progress quite as she had planned. She had, after all, invited the children in as individual decision makers and social actors. And, in time, the children brought their own social goals and, as a result, unanticipated language resources to the daily sharing time.

Their own offerings, and Louise's willingness to respond to those offerings, led to the evolution of what Bruner might call a "cultural forum" (1986, p. 127), in which children's social work and cultural resources and those officially introduced by Louise were connected and expanded in new ways. It was this forum that yielded a dialogic

interplay between teacher's and children's worlds and, thus, a permeable curriculum. Before I return to Louise's daily meeting, then, I turn to the children's worlds, where diverse social dialogues occurred as the children took control of the interactional space Louise offered.

Dialogues at Sea: The Social Work of Child Composing

All of the children engaged in a variety of kinds of social work; that is, they established and maintained diverse sorts of relationships with others. Moreover, like adult language-users, they drew upon different genres and different discourse traditions, including those of popular culture and of their sociocultural community. Herein, I aim only to highlight dominant kinds of social work, illustrating children's typical (but not mutually exclusive) ways of making social use of the daily composing time. The categorization or naming of these kinds of social work provides a helpful heuristic for discussing the children's actions, but it is only a heuristic. Children can accomplish varied kinds of social action simultaneously, and they can change social stances quite quickly (as can, of course, adults).

To illustrate their social work and cultural materials, I focus on three child products made during a study unit about oceans, in which Louise and the children talked and read about varied ocean creatures and visited a local aquarium. Fish became a popular topic during this time, as is evidenced by Lamar's "I am a swimmer" piece, Jameel's word-producing fish, and Eugenie's "Callm [clam] lives in here." (See Figures 3, 4, and 5.)

The children, then, had common official curricular experiences to draw upon, and they also were participants in a common official writing "workshop": they were to compose and then share their products, serving as a responsive, helpful audience for each other. And yet, the children enacted very different social dramas as they each took to the sea. Imagine, then, moving to different corners of Louise's classroom as I bring Lamar, Jameel, and Eugenie in focus one by one.

Table 1: Samples of Children's Social Work during Composing Time

Sample Text	Dominant Purpose	Text Sense	Addressee Role	Sample Addressee Response
Lamar's sea text	Social cohesion	Shared	Involved collaborators or confirmers	"Oh yeah!" "I know"
Jameel's song	Entertaining performance	Humorous/ Artful	Appreciative audience	"That's funny!"
Eugenie's clam text	Communication of information	Explicit/ Informative	Needy student	"Thank you"

Note: This chart is not intended to be comprehensive. It is intended only to illustrate that words like *audience* and *sense* do not have generic meaning.

Establishing Social Cohesion: Lamar and Trouble at Sea

Kindergartner Lamar's "I am a swimmer" piece was not energized by an anticipation of rug-time sharing but by composing-time collaborative play. That is, his evolving text was a tool for carrying on a dominant kind of social work in children's as well as adults' worlds--not simply communicating messages but establishing social cohesion, constructing a common world (see Table 1).

To establish cohesive relationships through *oral* stories, many children drew on material from popular culture--stories about superheroes, verses by rap stars, or scenes from horror movies. Such material was apt to elicit an "Oh yeah, I saw that too" from a child addressee, or a "Me too, I like that too." Sometimes the children jointly recounted the "best parts" of stories from the popular media. " 'Member when?" the children would say one after another as episodes were recalled. Sometimes too they engaged in rounds of storytelling, in which they recounted similar (if exaggerated) experiences, as each child outdid the other in the daringness (or

silliness) of their actions.

Such collaborative work couched Lamar's early forays into *written* composing as well, just as it did his "I am a swimmer" piece. In this event, Lamar's collaboration with his good friend James was filtered through each child's separate paper, as it were; but it was collaboration nonetheless, as the following excerpt illustrates. (Note that the ellipses between quotes is indicative of deleted text, and colons within quotes are indicative of enlongated pronunciation of the preceding syllable.)

> Lamar and James are drawing ocean scenes, in which they will confront the admired and dreaded shark, sometimes referred to by the boys as "Jaws," after a popular movie featuring a shark. Both boys tell and, sometimes, perform a story as they draw.
>
> James: (chants) I'm swimming in the lake, I'm swimming in the lake. I won't come in and eat my cake.
> This gonna be the waves. (drawing waves) This gonna be the waves.
> . . .
>
> Lamar: Do you know what these lines are? (pointing to his own drawing [see Figure 3]) They're the waves. They're pushing me this way.
>
> James: Look at these waves (pointing to his own drawing).
>
> Lamar: And then the water gets higher (drawing his waves higher). (Note that "and then" links Lamar's turn with his own previous turn, not with James's.)
>
> James: Mine's gonna get higher, too. My water's higher than you. (Note the use of pronouns ["Mine's"] and repetition ["gonna get higher, too."], both indices of story collaboration [Eder, 1988; Goodwin, 1990])
>
> Lamar: Shoot. Mine is higher than yours.
> . . .

Figure 3. Lamar's adventure at sea.

Mine is over my head. Told you mine's higher than yours. Mine got deeper. Deeper.

. . .

(to Tyler) Ain't this deep--ain't this deeper than James's?

Tyler: (nods) It's pretty deep.

. . .

James: Look at me diving in the water. Lamar, look at me diving in the water. Look at me diving in the water, Anthony.

. . .

Lamar: And then a shark was coming. Then a shark was coming. (The "and then" links back to Lamar's previous storylines.)

. . .

James: If they had a shark in the water, we'd get ready to get out of the water.

Lamar: I'm getting ready to get out of the water 'cause the shark. (Lamar takes James's idea and incorporates it into his own story.)

. . .

(chanting) I'm deep in the water. The shark's gonna kill me.

James: But oh:! There's a shark in the water. (Now James incorporates Lamar's idea into his own story. The "But oh:!" refers to a development in James's own piece.)

. . .

Lamar: I'm gonna make the blood coming out 'cause the shark bit the octopus. I'm gonna make the blood in the water. (adds red by octopus)

Later, with the help of Mrs. Johnson, a teaching assistant, both boys write "I am a swimmer."

The social meaning of Lamar's multimedia story (woven from talking, drawing, and writing) was linked to that of James's. The children declared themselves as vulnerable but brave--or "braver than you"--boys in a world of monsters. Each text was motivated by, and contributed to, the boys' relationship as best friends.

Taking the Spotlight: Jameel and the Singing Fish

Although Lamar's efforts were energized by his ongoing play with James, first grader Jameel's crafting of his fish text *was* fueled by the anticipation of rug-time sharing. But he did not eagerly await communication with helpful peers; he anticipated an artful performance for an appreciative, admiring audience (see Table 1). He brooked no advice from others when his moment in the spotlight finally arrived.

Although Jameel was the most consistent performer in his class, all of the observed children engaged in performances. In doing so, they often drew on their oral folk resources (i.e., the features of verbal art, which highlight the musical and image-creating properties of language [Bauman, 1986; Smitherman, 1986; Tannen, 1989]), and they also tended to explicitly manipulate their texts; for example, they tried to make words rhyme, phrases rhythmic, dialogue fast-paced, and images funny. The aim was not a confirming "me, too" but a pleased and perhaps surprised "Oh!" or even laughter.

To compose his singing fish, Jameel combined his interest in rhythmic, poetic, humorous prose with an interest in scientific exposition, and he brought together his enjoyment of popular cartoons with his fascination with the ocean study unit.

Jameel: [I wrote it] 'cause I love singing. Then I started loving animals. And then I thought, "I'll make 'em singing a song. A singing fish."

As seen in Figure 4, on the top of his paper, Jameel had drawn a fish with four large bubbles coming out of its mouth. These are both comic-like and air bubbles--a visual pun. In each bubble is a "tune," that is, the words being sung by the fish. (The words of the song had, in fact, come from comic-like and surreptitious operatic singing ["me me me" and "my my my"] many children, including Jameel, had been doing during morning singing.) The bottom half of the page is an exposition of the fish, written in a performative style, with paired, contrastive variants of a sentence. The voice on the bottom text is an "announcer," as Jameel explained. Moreover, Jameel had made a stapled pocket on the bottom of his song. This, he said, was for the money donations that would surely follow when he took his singing fish to the streets.

> Jameel: [People will] pay money for it, the fish. But it's gonna be me [taking the money]. And I'm only give the fish a itsy bitsy piece of candy. And I'm gonna keep the money.

However, the streets of most immediate concern were those of his classroom neighborhood. As he worked, Jameel did not want to sing his song to any of his neighbors, so to speak; they would have to wait for the appropriate time, that is, for show time on the rug.

Helping a Needy Colleague: Eugenie and the Clam in the Shell

Lamar's and Jameel's peer Eugenie, a first grader, displayed two different kinds of social work as she composed her ocean piece. One sort of work is similar to that displayed by Lamar, since it involves social cohesion. But it does not necessarily involve collaboratively producing a text. Rather, it involves collegially acknowledging peers as people in the same boat, as it were. That is, the children commiserated

Figure 4. Jameel's singing fish: "That fish isn't any ordinary fish. It's a singing fish."

about the trials and tribulations of learning to write, including spelling and spacing, doing it over and trying to read it. Listen, for example, to Eugenie's reaction to Shawnda's lament (colons in text are indicative of an elongated sound or syllable):

"Shucks," said Shawnda. "I erased that whole row [of writing] and I'm doing it over. (Eugenie giggles.) I don't care if it is recess time. I'm gonna do it over and I might do it over 10,000 times. I mean that."

"O::, I know how you feel, gir::l!" responded Eugenie with great conviction. "I KNOW, HOW, YOU, FEEL!"

The children valued informal, mutual helping. Colleagues help each other and do not expose each other's weaknesses in public places. Still, when the opportunity presented itself, Eugenie, like all the observed children, took the opportunity to teach a needy other, often using, at least in part, Louise's straightforward style and professional vocabulary. To accomplish this other kind of social work (see Table 1), Eugenie, as teacher, required a student, preferably a grateful one, and she found Vera a willing learner in the "clam" event. In the following excerpt, note how Eugenie presents a collegial "we" to Mrs. Johnson, despite her adoption of a leadership role with Vera. (Figure 5 presents Eugenie's completed text.)

> Eugenie and Vera have taken a shell from a large basket on the classroom. They are each going to write about what might have lived in that shell.
>
> Vera: Now what does live in this shell?
>
> . . .
>
> Eugenie: This is not fact. This is fiction. (Note the use of the school terms "fact" and "fiction.")
>
> . . .
>
> Do you think a clam might be living in here? See, like a clam might be living in here. But he left his color of this spot to let us know. It might be a little clam. (Note how Eugenie puts forth a

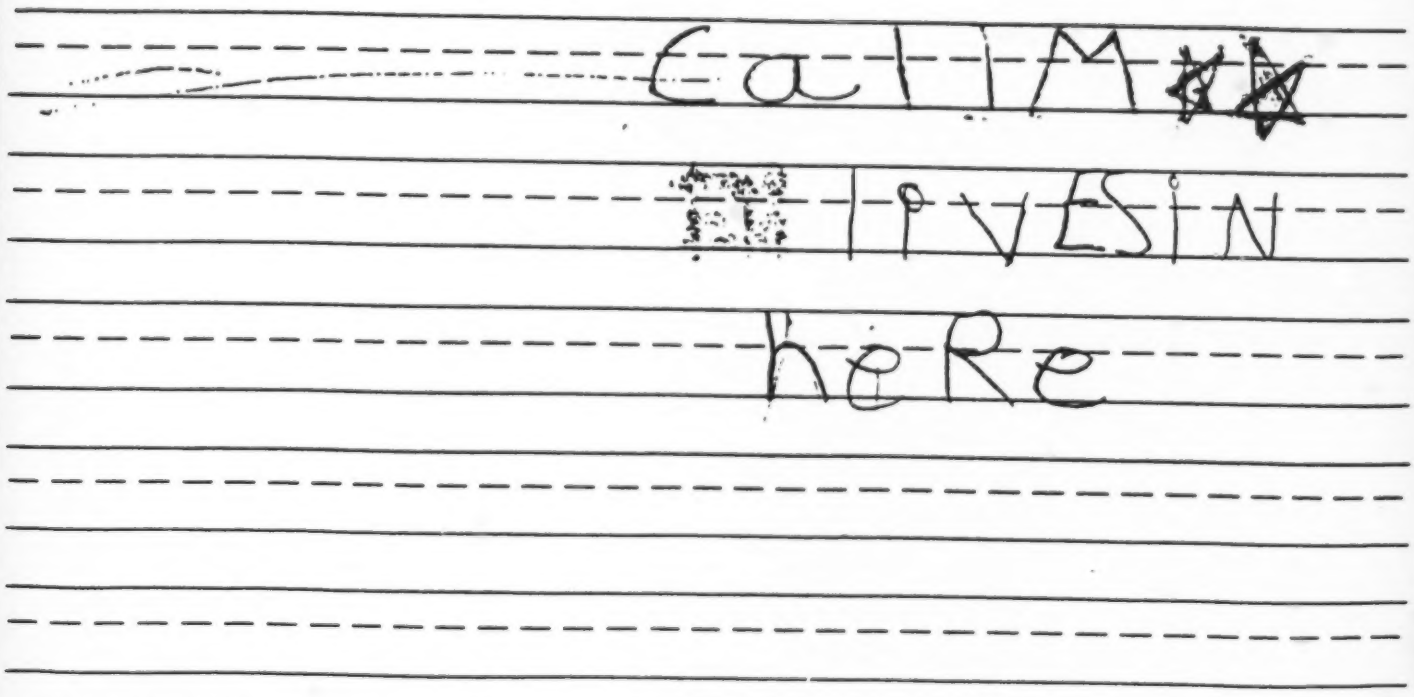

Figure 5. Eugenie's hypothesized clam shell.

hypothetical statement and links that statement to a previous observation [that the shell had a brown spot].)

Vera: That's true.

. . .

Eugenie: Mrs. Johnson, come here. Me and Vera made a decision. We thought that a clam might live in the shell. (Note the explicit reference to making "a decision"; such reference was common in Louise's talk to children but not common in the children's unofficial talk.)

Performers, colleagues, collaborators, teachers, and students--Lamar, Jameel, and Eugenie were complex social actors in classroom worlds, and these ends influenced their ways of enacting, participating in, classroom literacy events. They drew upon diverse sorts of cultural materials as they worked toward varied ends.

A Cultural Forum in Action

The children, with their diverse social roles and resources, did not fit neatly into the social order Louise originally had imagined. She had, for example, suggested an opening ten minutes of "quiet writing time," but her children *talked.* Moreover, Louise had anticipated children coming to the rug to communicate to a peer "audience" which would offer comments and suggestions. But the desire to communicate per se was not necessarily the children's dominant goal--indeed, sometimes the major goal was achieved before they arrived at the rug (as with Lamar's collaborative work with James). Further, the children objected to an advice-giving audience, a role, after all, that differs substantively from that of editor or

formal critic in our common culture (for elaboration of this point, see Dyson, 1992, in press).

Nor was it so easy for Louise to figure out what advice she should give about content. Most pedagogical suggestions for young children assume making a better, more sensible text has to do with making ideas more explicit (i.e., writing less "egocentrically"). But the crafting of the singing fish text, for example, did not have to do with explicitness but with rhythm.

The children were exploring the ways in which they might act on and in their worlds through the written medium. In response, Louise, first, allowed continued space for what the children were doing; after all, colleagues must be free to consult and commiserate, to admire and admonish--and to find a space apart for private shaping and reflection. Similarly, collaborators require partners, performers need an audience, and "teachers" must have "students," or they cannot enact their roles, display their skills, or accomplish the ends that make their lives satisfying. Louise sometimes explicitly and officially acknowledged that social work. For example, she talked with her children about their preferred ways of composing, making explicit the variation and offering choices. Did they wish to write alone? With a partner? In a quiet corner? On a table with other composers?

Second, Louise took advantage of the diversity of cultural material the children brought to the rug. In the presented examples, the genres included horror stories and pop songs, but they could have been cartoons or raps, "true stories" filled with hyperbole, or expressive "love stories".[4] In response to the children's inclusiveness, Louise worked to help children name their efforts, to place their work in the social landscape of discourse.

To do this, Louise provided children's texts with the dignity of a name (e.g., fiction, nonfiction, descriptions, songs, games, poems, jokes), a practice the children gradually engaged in as well. And she worked to establish connections between their efforts and that of the wider world of discourse. For example, when Lamar brought his "shark" piece to the meeting on the rug, he explained to the class about the shark, the octopus, and his own precarious presence in the water; in turn, Louise helped his

piece become part of general class reflection on fish stories that were mainly factual and those that were mainly fictional. (Louise herself introduced the term "whale of a tale.") Eugenie's piece fed into the cultural forum in similar ways, although, unlike Lamar, Eugenie made sure the class knew that she and Vera had worked on the same shell (a point made in part to irritate Vera's friend Shawnda, with whom Eugenie herself had a rather tenuous relationship).

Jameel's piece fed into the class forum in a particularly dramatic way, and therefore the interplay between Jameel's social intentions and Louise's response is particularly revealing. Jameel had come to the rug specifically to entertain the class--and he did so. Sitting on the rug during sharing time, Jameel sang his song for his classmates in a crooning voice, like Bing Crosby or Nat King Cole. His singing is presented in phrase groups, with hypens indicative of a careful pronunciation of the letter itself. (Note that colons are indicative of enlongated pronunciation of the preceding syllable.)

Jameel: M-Y-M-Y: (sings each letter in a smooth, rising tune, elongating the last Y; he has written periods after each letter [e.g., M.Y.M.Y.] to indicate that each is to be sung separately.)
M-Y-M-Y: (sings similarly)
M:-M: (continues on the high pitch with elongated Ms)
me me me: (even pitch)
you you you: (even but higher pitch)
my my my: (even but higher pitch)
M-Y-M-Y: (as before)
I: lo::ve (elongated and with a rhythmic drop and then rise in pitch)
you, to, boop boo bee do (syncopated)
M-Y-M-Y: (as before)
That fish isn't any ordinary fish. It's a singing fish. (reads

in an announcer's voice; note the repetition and variation in sentence structure)

Jameel's song received much applause and laughter. It was, in short, a hit. In the afternoon following his morning performance, many of his classmates decided to write songs themselves.

Louise responded to the songs by incorporating them and their participation framework (i.e., the performer and audience roles) into the official classroom world. As was Louise's strategy, she used professional language to establish links between the children's songs and those of the wider world and, just as importantly, to provide tools for reflection. She explained the necessity of taping their tunes; without special writing skills, taping would be the only way that those tunes could be remembered. She brainstormed with the children about other books they had read that contained tunes whose graphic features they could study, and she consulted with the school music teacher, who talked to the children about how music was written. Perhaps this respectful and serious response (filled, as it was, with good fun) contributed to Jameel's increased reflectiveness about his songwriting (e.g., purposefully checking his songs before performances, adjusting lines that didn't "work," that is, sound right to his ear).

Louise's response to Jameel's songs is indicative of the larger interplay among cultural material in her classroom. The children studied the local symphony and local rappers; they read folktales of varied peoples and children's books written in diverse vernaculars. Each child's own composed text thus entered into an intertextual universe--a school culture--that was not some kind of anemic world, where words are disembedded from social contexts (cf. Donaldson, 1978); it was one where words reverberated with the diverse rhythms and sounds of human voices. And, of course, one to which the children contributed. Thus, the enacted curriculum in Louise's classroom included a diversity of texts, of kinds of sense, and of possible dialogic responses to children's oral and written words.

From Permeable Curricular Main Roads to Limiting Side Roads

To clarify this concept of the permeable curriculum--this interplay between children's and adults' worlds--I consider events of one year later. Eugenie was then in the second grade and in another classroom, one in which interactive space and academic demands were more clearly specified, as, in fact, is a typical change in classrooms as children move through school (Goodlad, 1984). The "follow-up activity" to the Lincoln lesson was illustrative--the children were to fold their paper into eight boxes, unfold them, and then draw and write a fact about Lincoln in each box. In many similar activities, sample sentences were put on the board. While the children did not orally present their work, it was regularly "published," that is, bound in class-made books or displayed on bulletin boards.

The activities in which Eugenie and her peers engaged were commonplace. Her teacher was hardworking and caring, not an out-of-touch educator who passed out dittos and basal readers. But the very typical nature of the activities--and the ways in which they were enacted within the children's social worlds--made the classroom an invaluable setting for applying and, thereby clarifying, the concept of permeability. To reiterate, the aim herein is not to make generalizations about particular teachers or teaching practices but, through examining such particulars, to illuminate an idea--permeability--that might help educators in other situations "ferret out the unapparent import of things" (Geertz, 1973, p. 26), things like a child's text about Lincoln and love.

Historical Facts or Fiction: Eugenie and Mr. Lincoln

As Eugenie set to work on the Lincoln piece, she looked up from time to time at her two friends in the second grade, Vanessa and LaToya. (The friends' desks were strategically separated by her teacher.)

Eugenie began by drawing Lincoln wearing a tall hat, but her drawing was

interrupted by a loud whisper from Vanessa, who was holding up her picture. Vanessa was hard to hear, but she clearly had drawn Abraham Lincoln getting shot at a theater. Eugenie quickly wrote "He was nice" under her first picture and began work on her own theater picture. She drew a girl with long blond hair--Lincoln's child, she said, or maybe "a friend of his." (She wasn't sure if Lincoln had any kids or not.) Nonetheless, Eugenie had a dramatic scene in mind, one centered on what might have happened before that fateful trip to the theater:

> Eugenie: (presenting her work to me) She's [the drawn girl] saying, "I love you." Because before he got ready to go to the theater, she said, "Even if you get killed, I still love you." (said with great feeling)

Eugenie wrote "I Love You" in a bubble coming out of the girl's mouth. Then, with a glance at her teacher (in the corner with a child), she moved over to Vanessa's desk. LaToya soon followed.

Vanessa presented her completed paper to her two friends (see Figure 6). She had not focused on Lincoln's political life, the emphasis of the lesson, but on his personal life. While lacking in precise details, she had drawn Lincoln as a little boy by a house, Lincoln as a man by yet another house, Lincoln's girlfriend, Lincoln getting married (complete with wedding vows), and the house where Lincoln and his wife lived. Interspersed with Vanessa's presentation of her work, the children discussed their own views on boyfriends (they currently did not have them), growing up (much anticipated), and babies (they all wanted them).

Mrs. Walker, the classroom teaching assistant, who had just entered the room from another classroom, sent the girls back to their seats. Back in her own place again, Eugenie drew Lincoln's houses, his wife, and his wedding day (complete with vows). (See Figure 1; final three pictures completed at another time.)

Eventually, Vanessa and LaToya came to Eugenie's desk. Eugenie now

Figure 6. Vanessa's important facts about Lincoln.

presented her work to her friends, dramatically reading the line "I love you" and explaining its import. LaToya then motioned her friends into the classroom library; she had a dance step to show them. Her teacher saw the dancing and sent them back to their seats.

During this event, Eugenie's stance was primarily a collegial, at times collaborative, one. She discussed her decisions and textual content with her friends. Moreover, Eugenie's written voice was influenced by the social work she engaged in with her friends; her piece on Lincoln reflected the themes and dramatic style of the girls' talk among themselves. Eugenie had, in effect, composed an official school text by drawing on unofficial worlds. But that text did *not* function as a kind of crossroad among worlds.

There was no public forum for Eugenie to present her work in the official world, to bring out her performative language, the dramatized event she had imagined, the family life she had constructed when drawing. Without a forum, there was also no way to socially analyze the work (for example, the decision to imagine details), to compare it to other classmates' decisions, or to connect it with varied kinds of genres in the larger world (e.g., historical fiction, melodramas or child "love stories"). Her unofficial social and language work could not become part of the official classroom culture. Her text would be checked for completion according to the required assignment--paper folded into eight boxes, eight pictures and eight sentences about Lincoln's life, all nongenre-related criteria. In the official world, her "I do's" and "I love you" became textual equivalents to dancing in the library, behaviors clearly off the curricular main road.

Thus, Eugenie's social and language resources did not enter into the larger classroom community, nor, for that matter, did the language of the larger community enter in a substantive way into Eugenie's collegial talk and composing. Eugenie was not making decisions about potential kinds of literacy dialogues ("This is not fact. This is fiction."). She had composed along a curricular side road, one with limited possibility of connecting up with the main road.

Reflections on the Permeable Curriculum: Theoretical Themes

This essay began with an image of a teacher puzzling over Eugenie's piece about Mr. Lincoln. The teacher felt unconnected to the life world of her student, at a loss in her efforts to understand where Eugenie was coming from. This image is reflective of the feelings of many teachers about their students--and of the feelings of many students about their teachers (Rothman, 1992). Indeed, by the middle school years, the life worlds of school and those of peers and communities are often rigidly separated in the minds of students (Sleeter & Grant, 1991).

The intention herein is not to devalue the social and cultural materials of the official curriculum. But it is to suggest that those materials are of no use unless they engage children with the social and cultural worlds they know best and, moreover, to suggest that both child worlds and school worlds would be considerably enriched by the interplay made possible in a permeable curriculum. Such a curriculum seeks to acknowledge and respect the complexity of children's social worlds and cultural materials. And it attempts, not only to create bridges between worlds, but to support children's own naming and manipulating of the dynamic relationships among worlds. That is, it aims to help children understand and negotiate among multiple social worlds by means of diverse ways with words (Hymes, 1980). In complex modern societies, it is negotiating among--"managing" (Hymes, 1980, p. 45)--diverse ways with words that is the essential discourse challenge.

By highlighting the experiences of the children in Eugenie's school, I hoped to provide concrete examples of such permeability, of what respect for children's social worlds, and for their cultural materials, might look like, and of how a cultural forum might help both children's and teachers' worlds expand. Just as important, I hoped to illustrate the theoretical ideas about literacy, particularly composing, about cultural diversity, and about teaching that undergird such an evolving curriculum. Next, I highlight three key ideas and their implications for the permeable curriculum.

Composing as Social Dialogue

From the perspective of this essay, composing is always a situated response, an addressing of another in a particular time and place, a motivated making of words for some end. That is, written words are only mediators and, for young children especially, only partial mediators of social action. Approaching children's texts as social action, then, requires sensitivity to the logic of children's own social worlds. And those worlds, in turn, require interactive space in our classrooms. In the intimate worlds children construct together, they use a range of cultural resources to enact roles as colleagues and collaborators, performers and audience members, teachers and, of course, students.

Moreover, making use of children's social intelligence entails rethinking the generic nature of writing pedagogy for young children. Teachers *are* encouraged to arrange social situations in which child composers receive "responses" to their texts from "authentic" audiences of peers. But a teacher's quiet writing time might be a child's collaborative work period; a teacher's "whole-group writing" conference might be a child's show-time stage; and a teacher's occasion for peer editing might be viewed by the children as an occasion for collegiality. Considering children as social actors thus suggests that "audience," "editor," and "response" are situated, not generic, terms that can be explicitly discussed and planned for with children. And it suggests as well the importance of diverse situations for composing--and diverse text types.

To elaborate, pedagogical writing about child literacy often assumes that the developmental goal is "decontextualized" written language (e.g., Olson, 1984), that is, language in which ideas are made explicit in tightly constructed prose, rather than implicitly understood by familiar interlocutors. But, given that written language always exists within a kind of social relationship, so-called "decontextualized" language also exists only in certain situational and text contexts, that is, in certain genres. Moreover, children can begin writing by producing a diversity of genres--and any one child may control diverse sorts of texts. Official recognition of diverse types or genres, though, necessitates a dialogic perspective, not simply toward literacy, but

toward cultural traditions themselves.

A Dialogic Perspective on Cultural Traditions

As social actors, young children draw on a diversity of cultural materials. The easy ways in which they move among cultural traditions, creating stories that blend folk, popular, and written traditions, reflect, in fact, the complex, dialogic relationships that link traditions. For example, the daily rhythms of music and talk that arise from the regional and ethnic cultures of our society--from the "folk"--have transformed both "popular" and "high" culture (Gates, 1989). In addition, popular cultural forms can express an oppositional attitude--a distancing, a playfulness--to the "high," the serious, the "towering" (Bakhtin, 1981), which may account for their appeal to the young.

However, most discussions of young children as literacy users draw firm lines between the literacy experiences of children who have had extended preschool exposure to children's literature and, particularly, storybooks, and of those who have not had such experiences. Through reading and talking about books, parents introduce children to the explicit or "decontextualized" prose valued in school. And yet, children's literature draws on a diversity of cultural genres, including jazz tunes and folk songs, cartoons and oral lore, as well as the wealth of spoken English vernaculars (Kushkin, 1980). Moreover, cultural labels are themselves quite fuzzy; for example, in nineteenth-century America, "popular culture"--the cultural art forms meaningful to diverse regional, class, and ethnic groups--included Shakespeare, opera, and classical music, along with juggling, parodies, and songs (Levine, 1988).

Recently, scholars working with older students have emphasized how the rhetorical features of peer and folk ways with words (e.g., oral stories and language plays, metaphors and insult games) are potentially powerful learning and language tools across the curriculum. And they have written about their efforts to help students make deliberate use of their range of discourse strategies in both literary and academic writing (Ball, 1992; Redd, 1992; Scott, 1990; Smitherman, 1986,

forthcoming). We who work in early childhood and elementary education can contribute to such efforts by broadening our vision of the kinds of cultural resources that support literacy growth.

Perhaps there is a fear of acknowledging and building upon diverse discourse themes, genre structures, and styles, because of our human propensity toward dichotomous thinking. As educators, we have categorized children as "at-risk" or not, "mainstream" or "nonmainstream," and we have associated certain categories--and the possibility of school success--exclusively with certain ways of using language. More broadly, as a society, we have used speech styles and art forms as ways of gauging intellectual and aesthetic superiority and inferiority, of reinforcing boundaries of class, ethnicity, and culture (Hymes, 1980; Levine, 1988).

But language in use is inherently diverse--changing with situation, role, and activity--and humans are remarkably flexible language users; given a reason (and opportunities for practice), we are code-switchers, register collectors, and players with speech (Garvey, 1990; Gilyard, 1991; Labov, 1969). There is no reason to assume that a child who writes pop songs for a singing fish cannot deliver a lecture on the nature of ocean creatures--certainly Jameel could (particularly when given an opportunity to teach; for examples, see Dyson, 1992, in press). Nor, of course, is there a reason to think that an effective lecture can be given in only one style (Farr, 1993). To repeat, the essential language skill is not mastery of any one genre or style--it is the capacity to negotiate among contexts, to be socially and politically astute in discourse use.

Further, while there is ample reason for adult concern about the sometimes sexist, racist, and violent images of the popular media, children's literature is not immune from such charges (Gilbert, 1989; Sims, 1982). Moreover, lack of acknowledgement of many young students' deep fascination with the popular media does not help them develop a critical perspective.

The acknowledgement of human and language complexity seems to be a critical first step in respectful relationships between teachers and students and in the building of a shared life, which leads to the final idea that undergirds the permeable

curriculum, that of a cultural forum.

Curiosity, Respect, and the Cultural Forum

Like us all, children negotiate membership in overlapping, sometimes contradictory, worlds governed by "imaginative universes"--cultures, as it were, or shared ways of infusing objects and actions with meaning (Geertz, 1973). But, as teachers, we only have access to parts of children's selves. Respect for the diversity of children's worlds and for the partiality of our own visions keeps us from putting children into neat "sociological categories of race, social class, ethnicity and family structure [which then] become the primary factors of differentiating among children" (Lightfoot, 1978, p. 211). Respect also fuels our interest in children's lives, our desire as teachers to understand the factors that contribute to a child's wholeness, to their individuality.

Teachers with such curiosity talk with (not simply about) parents and community members, seeking insight into children's lives beyond the school walls and into the language use that pervades those lives (for suggestions about such talk, see Barr et al, 1988). Moreover, they invite children themselves to share responsibility for negotiating the language life--the valued texts--of classroom life (Genishi, 1992). In this way is the negotiated culture of the classroom enriched, as diverse genres, diverse cultural traditions, mingle on the classroom stage, giving rise to "new possibilities, new speculations, new styles" (Rosen & Rosen, 1973, p. 32).

Critical to such negotiation is an ongoing cultural forum. I am not referring to a "whole-class conference," the main purpose of which is to support the development of individual children's writing. Rather, I am suggesting a *forum*, within which children might explain about Lincoln and imagined loves, about Jaws in the deep and decisions about clams, and within which we as educators connect their efforts with the world beyond. And, at the same time, it is a forum in which our own world view is enriched by those of the children.

In Closing: Behind the Curricular Curtain

In *The Woman Warrior,* Maxine Hong Kingston (1977) writes about the puzzlement and alarm her elementary school teachers expresed about her school paintings.

"I painted layers of black over houses and flowers and suns," she wrote, "and when I drew on the blackboard, I put a layer of chalk on top" (p. 192). Her teachers consulted with her parents rather than with the silent Maxine, but her parents did not speak English. What no one, parents or teachers, knew was that Maxine "was making a stage curtain, and it was the moment before the curtain parted or rose." When her parents took her pictures home, Maxine "spread them out (so black and full of possibilities) and pretended the curtains were swinging open, flying up, one after another, sunlight underneath, mighty operas."

In a similar way, dramas unfold behind the curtain of the official curriculum. Those dramas, like the ones of Hong Kingston's imagination, are the stuff of children's lives (indeed, they are the stuff of our own memories of childhood)--dramas of friends and fights, of imagined melodramas and high adventures, and, in fact, of the thrill of being behind the curtain, protected in some way from the judgments and orders of the adult world. Still, if we are to teach the children, we have to tap into these child worlds, and we have to offer them tools--ways of thinking and talking--that will help them negotiate their way into a future of possibilities.

In a troubled world of poverty and violence, of racism and sometimes breathtaking indifference, we cannot pave children's way. But, as teachers, we can help. Within our classrooms, children compose texts that declare their existence in the world, but that existence is acknowledged, momentarily completed, only by the response of the other (Bakhtin, 1986). In our own responses to the children, we help shape their understanding of what it means to be an educated person in our society. If our classrooms are not places for a diversity of social action and a wealth of cultural materials, we risk sending messages of alienation, messages that say that educated people are not rooted in their own histories, in strong relationships with

people that matter.

Moreover, we deny them, and ourselves, the scholarly benefit--and the good fun--possible when language and experiences are shared. For, in answering the children, we are also composing ourselves. In their plurality, in their diversity, our children offer us the opportunity to open wider the curtains framing our own world view, so that we might see aspects of experience that otherwise would remain invisible to us, so that we might better understand ourselves as situated in a complex world of multiple perspectives (Greene, 1988).

Eugenie's piece on Lincoln and love, for example, set me wondering about the story of the Civil War and about history itself as it was taught to me, that is, as a series of wars. I wondered what a little girl like Eugenie (or like the once-me), so attuned to relationships, could identify with in such a story--what would tap her experiences and feelings, what would feed into her social talk with friends. I thought about why she and her friends had snuck around behind the curricular curtain, situating Lincoln in the themes of their own play. And I wondered about how the children's fascination with Lincoln and his loves connected with the political stories of relationships (sanctioned and not) that pervade our political campaigns. I reflected on how history (including war) becomes a dehumanized topic, on how humanized history attracts so many of us (as did the PBS special on the Civil War).

I wondered and wandered far from Eugenie, Lincoln, and the second grade, and then returned again to underscore, as I do now, the complexity of social work and intellectual thought that are revealed when we push back the curricular curtains. Children's texts are sites for negotiation among multiple social worlds, worlds energized by dreams and fears, friendships and kinships. In working to create a permeable curriculum, we bring at least some of the energy of these worlds into the official classroom world and, in so doing, we enrich the cultural conversations of us all.

Notes

1. Temple, Nathan, Temple, and Burris (1993) is a thorough text (now in its third edition) that, in emphasis, represents well dominant perspectives. The first chapter begins with an example of invented spelling. Although the importance of adult modeling is emphasized, the child is characterized as egocentric, with reference to Piaget, and learning to write is presented primarily as an act of discovery.

2. For an illuminating autobiographical portrayal of a child's negotiation among worlds, see Gilyard, 1991.

3. To elaborate, I was interested in the contextual specifics of children's discourse use. I wondered how children used varied kinds of language art forms and cultural traditions (e.g., those of their ethnic communities, of popular culture, of shared classroom literature) as they interacted with teachers and peers throughout the school day, that is, as they engaged in social work through oral and written language. (For discussions of the ethnography of communication, the traditions of which guided this work, see Gumperz & Hymes, 1986; for details of data collection and analysis, see Dyson, in press.)

4. "True stories" was a term used by the children. It referred to exaggerated stories with elements of truth in them (for discussions of the role of such stories in African American culture, see Smitherman, 1986, and Heath, 1983, who uses the same emic term). "Love stories" was also a child term, introduced by Jameel, to refer to texts composed of questions and statements about classmates' special friends.

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